

KEEPING ONE HORSE.

Extracts from prize essay in *Jane American Agriculturist*, by G. F. Burnham, Mt. Holly Springs, Pa.:

I purchased my horse on the 25th of November, and the first thing to be done was to decide as to his stable; should it be in the basement of the barn, or on the floor above, should it be light or dark, should he sleep on the plank at night and stand on the ground by day, or when not at work, should he eat from a rack or a manger, and if from a rack at what elevation?

Now up to the time of the purchase of this horse, my experience in the care and general management of the useful animal had been so slight that I very much desired the advice of some one who knew by long and critical observation and use, just what this stable ought to be, and fortunately for me, my next door neighbor, Thaddeus Hamilton, a man of seventy-five years, knew all that long experience could teach about horses, their care in winter and summer, their management in the barn, in the pasture, and in the harness, and also as to their diseases, the safest and most efficient remedies.

Now, notwithstanding my name was Swift, Uncle Thad, with his keen perceptions, saw something in my movements and habit that had in fact him from my childhood to call me Slack, and as I turned my horse from the road to the barn, Uncle Thad shouted (he always spoke loud), "Well, well, Slack, what have you got there?"

"A family horse," I replied, "one for the women and children to drive, and for occasional work about the farm. Please come over, Uncle Thad," I said, "and tell me something about his stable."

"Now Slack," said he, as he patted with his wrinkled hand my horse, "you have done better in your purchase than you know. Your horse appears to be sound in wind and limb, a rare condition in these days, and that he is kind, true, and gentle, is plainly indicated in every line of his pleasant face. He is worthy of a good stable, and I'll tell you just what it should be. It should be six feet wide. The floor, whether of plank or the ground, should slope to the rear so as to admit the urine to run away, but not so great a slope as to cause weariness to his limbs, as would be the case were his heels much lower than the front of the feet. Some people prefer a box stall so that he may be left untied, but it is not altogether necessary, and is often attended by more difficulties and discomforts both to yourself and your horse, than advantages. It makes little difference whether the floor be plank or ground. The ground would be softer and cooler in summer, but it is objectionable because of its liability to become uneven in the locality of the feet, and the prevalence of ammonia and other injurious gases and vapors arising from the urine and manure which the ground absorbs. If you will keep the ground on which he stands even and clean, the renewals of soil as often as may be required, then by all means, other things in his care being equally accessible and convenient, put him on the ground, especially in the summer. But if you allow the depression that will soon be formed where his feet are, to remain, and the ground to become offensive because of unremoved excrements, or by a retention of the smell thereof to an offensive degree in the ground on which he stands or lies, then his comfort will surely be diminished and his health impaired."

"But why not keep him on a plank floor, Uncle Thad, as that is so easily cleaned and kept in good condition?"

"Why, certainly, you can use a floor of plank for his stable, and he will be comfortable and healthy thereon, but he should be well supplied with straw or litter to make it softer for his feet while standing, and easier for a bed at night."

"Yes, Uncle Thad, no doubt that would add to his comfort, but if I should move to New England, as we think now is probable, it would be difficult to procure straw."

"Well, friend Slack, I know by long experience all about New England, and though you will not be able to procure straw there, except at high prices, there are but few farms there without large patches of bracken (ferns), which will be a good substitute for straw, and there are also there, on most farms, acres of low land grass to be procured which will make good litter, and is worth but little for any other purpose, and if some of these, there will be bushes and bushes of forest leaves, easily gathered, and excellent for bedding and manure. But now, Slack, there are some things about your plank floor that must be attended to promptly and regularly: Never use litter for his bed after it has been saturated with urine, or offensive with manure. I know people who use the same bedding when it smells so strong you can hardly stay in the barn, and, what is still worse, they pitch it under his manger to remain by day where he must inhale the noxious odors, and even this course is recommended by good authority as Yonatt, but no horse can relish its food when compelled to partake of it over, or in the presence of, so much that is disgusting, to say nothing of its injury to his health."

"Why, Uncle Thad, I have seen horses eat such litter as you speak of, even after it had been thrown out on the manure heap."

"Yes, yes, Slack, so have I, and I

have seen men eat tobacco; but I never knew a boy to whom tobacco was not at first offensive. No horse in good health, and sufficiently supplied with wholesome food, will ever be found eating his litter. Almost all animals are cleanly in their habits, and even the hog, when his pen is so arranged that he can be so, and the horse is particularly neat. So, once for all, keep your horse and all his surroundings clean, as you value his comfort and health."

"Here is a little kink, Slack, in this matter, worth knowing, as it will aid you in keeping his stable clean. No horse, if he can well help it, will urinate in his harness, and nearly all horses can be taught to do it, after the drive, and before they are put into the stable. I teach mine in this way. Unharness the horse and lead him to the manure heap outside of the barn, letting him stand so that his fore feet will be just on the manure (it being largely composed of straw), and by performing the act yourself, he will, after a few trials, do so himself. The tendency on his part may be increased at first if you will make a low whistle with your lips, and also by slightly blowing, cause the saliva in your mouth to pass between your teeth, making a sound something like the rushing of a small stream of water. Remember to never, on your part, manifest the least disappointment or anger if he at any time does not comply with your wishes."

"Shall I feed his hay in a rack, or in a manger, Uncle Thad?"

"I have used both, and both are good, but some horses will poll all the hay from a rack before eating it, and let it fall down to their feet; for such I should use a manger."

"I have seen a horse, Uncle Thad, that would push with his nose all the hay from a manger to the floor before eating it."

"Yes, we see horses do most everything, even to eating their manure, and the street nitching poets, but the long and short of the whole matter is, that for all horses, the manger is the best form, the upper portion to be about even with his breast, and the bottom no lower than his knees. Nail slate across the top to prevent pushing out the hay, the slats to be about two feet apart. Put slats also a little above the bottom of the manger, for the seeds, sticks and refuse to pass through."

"Some folks think, Uncle, that a horse will be inclined to carry his head higher when in the harness, if he feeds from a rack, than he would if fed from a manger."

"Some folks, Slack, don't know. Let your observation guide you as to the truth or reasonableness of what men say, when you can see as well as they. The natural food of the horse is the short green grass growing on the ground; now there are no horses in the world that naturally carry their heads higher, when traveling, than the wild ones. The same may be said of colts that never pulled their feed from a rack. If a rack is used, it should be so low, that the dust and seeds from the hay will not fall into his nostrils and eyes."

"What kind of hay is best?"

"Timothy hay is unquestionably best for horses, but I have had them do just as well on clover hay, though generally they will not do so well on clover hay, for the reason, in part, that it is not properly cured. To be safe and sure, feed Timothy, and be sure to cut your grass before it goes to seed. Neither buy nor feed hay of any kind that, when cut, was so far matured as to allow of the shelling of its seeds. Corn stalks cut before the corn has hardened, and so cured and kept as to be bright and green in color, make excellent feed. Now, Slack, whatever you feed in the way of hay, be sure and remove every day, from the bottom of his rack or manger, all that he has refused to eat, and never feed him at any one time more than he will eat of that which is eatable. Again, your horse will do well on clean bright straw, especially if you cut the straw and sprinkle it, after it is moistened with clean water, with some kind of ground grain. If your hay is in a mow or in bales, remove from the mow or bale no more at once than you feed at that time, and if you cut your hay, or straw, then cut at one time no more than you will feed at that time. If from any cause you are compelled to feed hay that is dusty, it will be eaten more readily if moistened with clean water; this will relieve his cough if he has one."

"Well, how about feeding him grain, what kind shall it be, and how much?"

"The best way to feed grain is to mix it with cut hay or straw, in which case it must be ground. There are but few horses that will keep fat on hay alone, perhaps none will do so and work. If you work your horse, and by work I mean driving him nearly every day a distance of ten or fifteen miles, or less, and draw heavy loads, he will require some grain, the more according as his work is increased. For the work above named I would feed him grain equal to at least four quarts of oats a day; some horses you must remember require more than others, and that there is no better grain to feed a horse doing little or light work than clean, clean oats. If you require considerable work, then cut your hay or straw, moisten it with clean water and mix therewith feed made of corn one bushel, oats two bushels, and rye or wheat half a bushel, ground together, and in amount about two quarts in the morning, one at noon, and about four quarts at night, increasing or diminishing according to the nature or needs of your horse and the amount of work performed. If his grain is ground and moistened, his

feed-box will in time become sour, especially in the summer, but it must not remain so. Keep it sweet by frequent cleansing and by using hot water, if necessary."

"Well, well, Uncle Thad, there are, it seems, a great many things to know and remember in the care and keeping of a horse. I fear you have already told me more than I can remember."

"Perhaps so, but there is a little more to be said respecting his care, and still more about his diseases. In extreme cold weather his comfort will be increased and health protected if his drinking water is warmer than it would be when in contact with ice, and particularly so when he is warm from work or very thirsty. If you will accustom him, and you can do so, by giving him a little at a time, to drink three times a day in winter, it will be better for him than to drink only twice. And whenever at work, or on the road, see to it that he is allowed to drink often, and but little at a time when warm from exertion. He should have as often as once a week, and all he will eat."

"How about his blankets, his harness, and the use of the comb and brush?"

"There again comes a matter in which different horses require different treatment. Some horses will endure a degree of cold without injury or suffering that others can not. Some, on a cold morning, will shiver even with a blanket on, while another in an adjoining stall, without a blanket, will not be uncomfortable. As a general rule keep a blanket on your horse in winter. If your stable is warm a thin blanket will be better than a heavy, thick one. Whenever, after a drive in winter, you stop, and leave your horse to stand out of doors, do not fail to cover him warmly, and so tie him that he will not have the wind, especially if it be strong, blowing in its face. Some horses need more cleaning than others; some enjoy the using of the curry-comb, while to others it is a torment. When your horse has perspired freely, and when he is dusty from the road, or smeared with mud, clean him. In all things seek his comfort. My general rule is to use the brush and broom, and a wooden comb, more than the curry-comb. Aside from his bridle I will say nothing without his harness. Check reins are generally an affliction of great severity, and their use should be limited, if permitted at all. More horses are injured, both physically and in appearance, or style of movement, by an excessive application of the check rein than most people are aware of. Bladders will possibly be always used, but for all horses going freely, without the use of the whip, they are not only useless, but positively injurious. Never fail to get the frost out of the bits before they touch his mouth or lips. In regard to his shoes, I will only say that it is a mistaken idea that the best smith is the one who makes his shoes stay on the longest. Have the horse's shoes reset as often as once a month. Knock the snow-balls from his feet when he comes in with them, and if his legs are muddy or wet, see that they are cleaned and dried as soon as possible, and remember to do all cleaning elsewhere than in his stable."

"Flies are a terrible torment to a horse in the summer and autumn, and a net should be used when you drive. Darken his stable so as to prevent their troubling him when he is in his stall."

"Be sure that gentleness and kindness temper your every act and word in the presence of your horse. He will love you if you are loveable, and will do more and better for you when impelled by love than by fear. Never clean, handle or be near him when he is eating his grain. Never curse or swear in his presence. Never whip him for shying at an object at which he is frightened. Never kick him for stepping on a thill that his blinders prevent him from seeing, or on your own foot, which he had no idea was so much larger than his own."

"In regard to diseases of your horse, their cause, prevention, and cure, the first thing to be said is, keep your horse in good condition and you will prevent nearly all the diseases to which he is subject; still, some horses will at times, and under apparently the best of care, be 'out of condition,' as they say; their eyes will be dull, their hair rough; they will look and feel badly. Give them then a change of food, and in their feed a tablespoonful of sulphur, and a warm mess of bran. When these conditions are accompanied with 'hide-bound,' make a strong tea of tamarack bark, in which soak his oats, and a few feedings of this will work out the desired improvement."

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